

JAMES STIRTON (c.1833-1917)

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This is one in a series of articles about prominent British and Irish field-bryologists of the past. The author would be very pleased to learn of any information which supplements its content.

A Social and Biographical History of British and Irish Field-bryologists is also available on-line at <http://britishbryologicalsociety.org.uk/>

Botanical career

Stirton was studying bryophytes and lichens by the 1850s and '60s, and spent many holidays exploring the Scottish Highlands and western coast. He did much to elucidate the remarkable flora of Ben Lawers, and discovered *Tortella limosella* near Arisaig in 1906, the only occasion on which this species has ever been found.

He contributed an account of mosses and lichens to '*Notes on the Fauna and Flora of the west of Scotland*' (edited by E.R. Alston, 1876), records of about 50 species of lichen that were new to Britain for W.A. Leighton's *Lichen Flora of Great Britain* (3rd edition, 1879), and numerous articles to *Glasgow Naturalist*, *Grevillea*, *Scottish Naturalist*, *Annals of Scottish Natural History* and other periodicals.

Stirton encouraged Peter Ewing in his bryological studies. He was also an active member of the Glasgow Society of Field Naturalists from its foundation in 1871, and at one time became its president.

His plants are at the Natural History Museum in London, and Glasgow.

Family background and biography

James Stirton was born in Coupar Angus, Perthshire, a son of George Stirton (1802-1891, a saw miller and wood merchant of Caputh) and Elisabeth (*née* Watson, 1799-1887). George was a son of James Stirton and Margaret (*née* Scott). Elisabeth was born at Glamis, a daughter of James Watson, linen manufacturer.

James Stirton taught mathematics at Merchiston School in Edinburgh from 1856 until 1858, in which year he graduated as doctor of medicine in Edinburgh, moving soon afterwards to Glasgow, where he acquired an extensive practice as an obstetrician and gynaecologist.

Stirton became lecturer in gynaecology at the Royal Infirmary in 1876, where for many years he had charge of the wards for diseases of women. He became professor of midwifery at Anderson's College Medical School (St. Mungo's) in 1889, and held the latter appointment for about fifteen years.

In 1860 he married Jessie McLaren (born c.1827-31). Jessie was born in Edinburgh; she was probably a daughter of Margaret McLaren (born c.1798), a wine merchant, and living at East Park, Maryhill, Lanarkshire in 1851. In 1861 James and Jessie were living at 8 Newton Street, Blythswood, Glasgow, although the 1863, 1867 and 1875 editions of the General Medical Register list Stirton as at 14 Roxburgh Street, Edinburgh, so presumably he maintained links with Edinburgh during this period. James and Jessie had two daughters: Elizabeth Watson (or Eliza, "Lizzie", 1861-1939) and Margaret Campbell ("Maggie", 1863/66-?1944). By 1871 the family had moved along Newton Street to number 15. They were still there in 1881, but had moved to number 5 Newton Terrace in an adjacent district of the city by 1891, and were still there when Stirton died on January 14th 1917. In the 1920s and '30s Elizabeth and Margaret were living at 22 Woodlands Terrace, Glasgow.

The botanist and taxonomist Charles Howard Stirton (born Pietermaritzburg, Natal, South Africa, 1946) is related to James Stirton. He was formerly Deputy Director of Kew Gardens, London, founding Director of the National Botanic Gardens in Wales, and subsequently Honorary Research Associate and Mellon Foundation Mentor at the University of Cape Town, South Africa.

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